

INTRO

- Can you share a time when you were unexpectedly pulled into a situation you didn't choose? How did it impact you?

We continue in our Lenten series, **The Cross**, which is about encounters with Jesus, the cross and the transformation it can bring.

READ

Mark 15:21 (see also Mt 27:32, Lk 23:26)

REFLECT

Simon was an outsider, just passing by, when he was thrust into carrying Jesus' cross. In doing so, he shared the injustice, suffering, and shame of Jesus' cross.

Q: How can we trust that even unfair burdens or hardships in our own lives can be used for God's purposes?

Q: What does it mean for you to identify with Jesus in suffering today?

Simon didn't choose to carry the cross, but it changed him and likely resulted in his family becoming disciples of Jesus, too (Mark references his sons, and Paul, in Rom 16:13, mentions a Rufus, likely the son of Simon).

The Romans compelled Simon to take up the cross. Jesus calls us to take up the cross:

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Mark 8:34

Jesus' call to take up the cross isn't about suffering for suffering's sake—it's about stepping into the life He offers on the other side of the surrender.

Q: What might taking up the cross look like in your life right now?

The cross is a paradox: on the one hand, it speaks of death very clearly and vividly, yet, as we know from the Easter event, it also leads to life and victory. Our participation in Christ's suffering and death leads to sharing in his power and life. As Simon's journey shows, moving from spectator to participant is crucial in our faith journey.

Q: What do you think about this paradox, and how have you experienced this in your life?

Practical Application:

- Identify an area of your life where you've been a "spectator." What step can you take this week to become more actively engaged?
- Reflect on a current struggle or burden. How might you reframe it as an opportunity to identify with Christ and grow in faith?

PRAY

- Pray for the courage to embrace the cross we are called to carry.
- Ask God to transform burdens into opportunities to draw closer to Christ.
- Invite the Spirit to identify areas in our lives where we need to move from spectatorship to active discipleship.